



The Young Offenders with Disabilities (YOD) Research Project

2007/2008

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ABSTRACT

The Young Offenders with Disabilities (YOD) Research Project is the continuation of research initiated in reachAbility's 2007 RYDLE program. It serves as an analysis of the contributing factors to juvenile delinquency and the barriers encountered by young persons living with a disability after coming into conflict with the law. Examination of the factors, barriers, and plausible solutions are intended to bring a greater understanding as to what leads youth to engage in criminal behavior. The suggested remedies are intended to serve as a reference in future reachAbility research and programs. The findings will also serve as a valuable contribution to the breadth of research in this field.

Major findings of this report include the following:

- Initiating interventions tailored to the individual; followed by transitions that incorporate the family unit; must precede, and will catalyze the facilitation of positive change within societal systems.
- Rural areas face unique (but manageable) challenges inter-related to youth and delinquency.
- Young offenders that live with a disability and come in conflict with the law often encounter stigma related to their disability as well as stigma from their criminal record and behavior.
- Mentors that are available to youth should be optimized as much as possible.
- Family, Environment, Disability, Geographic Location, and Education can be contributors to delinquent behavior by youth.

The intention of the final recommendations is to aid the community in preventing criminal behavior by youth and to support youth who have come into conflict with the law.

INTRODUCTION

Problems exist within the Canadian criminal justice system. Some of these problems are obvious, while others require a thorough examination of the system in order to be identified. Offenders that are prosecuted for their offences represent a small portion of the nation's population that does not conform to the societal norms of personal conduct. It is the responsibility of society to ensure that offenders are penalized accordingly and, if possible, re-integrated into society. When penalization occurs many factors

are considered, including any circumstances that may have contributed to the actions of the subject¹. An individual must be accountable for his or her own actions, but the influence that a disability has had on the actions of an offender is often considered during sentencing. The disability is not viewed as an excuse, but rather an explanation for the actions of an offender².

Mental illnesses, at varying levels of severity, are common among the criminal population. Many times the illness is not diagnosed until after delinquent actions occur, or after the subsequent penalization for said actions; that is if it is diagnosed at all. Hence, the number of mental health consumers with a criminal history is disproportionate to the number of people with mental health issues within society as a whole³. Furthermore, the demographic of young offenders may contain many more individuals with undiagnosed disabilities. A young offender's disability may be overlooked as their delinquency is attributed to peer-pressure or personal misconduct.

This project is intended to identify the most prolific contributive factors causing youth with a disability to engage in criminal behavior, as well as to identify significant barriers that these youth face during their reintegration into society. Adding clarity to the link between disability and the criminal activities of youth is a goal of this report. Realistic recommendations regarding what should be done by both the individual and society will be the product of a critical examination of collected data and relative research.

The focus of this project is primarily on young offenders living in rural communities across Nova Scotia. This report will illustrate specific challenges faced by municipalities outside of major urban centers in their attempt to prevent, reduce or eliminate the offences committed by youth living with disabilities. In order to address these challenges, recommendations intended specifically to suit the needs of rural communities will be made. Suggestions and recommendations made by young offenders

¹ Youth Justice Feasibility Study, page 47

² Brad Furey, interviewed YOD Expert

³ Perspectives On Youth Crime

and the professionals who encounter them regularly, will contribute to the final recommendations. Interviews with YOD and the experts that encounter them regularly will be the foundation of the subjective research material for this research project. Twenty young offenders with disabilities were interviewed specifically for this YOD research project. The examination of relative academic studies, and survey results received from RCMP officers and youth focused organizations, have all contributed to the composition of the YOD research, as well as the final conclusions and recommendations.

The Social Process Model of Adolescent Deviance (Erickson, Crosnoe, Dornbusch 2000)

provides a set of factors that are believed to contribute to the behavior of an individual¹. These factors and sub-factors will be applied to reachAbility's YOD research and interviews. The contributing factors, derived from those of the Social Process Model, are: family, environment, disability, geography and education. Sub-factors elucidate the specific elements that have a causal effect on a person's behavior. The subjects of the YOD project will have these specific aspects of their lives examined in an attempt to understand what factors have the most significant influence on their lifestyle and behavior. Patterns in the research will identify the most common problems and will lead to the suggestion of remedies for said problems with the hope of preventing delinquent behavior by a youth with a disability.

The transition from youth to adulthood is accompanied by many barriers. The way in which these barriers are overcome and dealt with will often dictate the type of adult that a youth will become upon maturity. Some of life's barriers are easily addressed and surmounted, while others can be stressful and difficult; this is especially true concerning YOD. The barriers that they face can be unique to the individual, the disability, and to their state of mind. The barriers can also be identical to those encountered by a person without a disability. Overcoming the barriers of life can be difficult while living with a disability. The significant barriers that will be examined and addressed in this report are: 1) Stigma 2) Criminal Record 3) Lack of Mentorship 4) Lack of Treatment 5) Lack of Familial/Community

¹ Youth Justice feasibility Study

Support 6) Negative Peer Groups and 7) Education. This report will examine and identify these barriers, determine the most common ones, and illustrate the serious problems and negative circumstances in the lives of YOD. Feasible recommendations to address these barriers will follow the elaboration of each barrier.

reachAbility's objective of advocating for and with people with disabilities is continued in this report. The YOD research project is an endeavor to assist youth with disabilities in reaching their full potential.

Contributing Factors to the Delinquency of Youth

The Social Process Model of Adolescent Deviance, (Erickson, Crosnoe, & Dornbusch, 2000), relates the motivation for deviant behavior to a desire for the gratification of unfulfilled needs. The model assumes individuals learn acceptable social conduct and attitudes from intimate relationships. If strong relations and positive role models are not present in the life of a youth, peer approval may become paramount. Youth seeking peer approval is common in society and is considered normal and healthy by society. When a negative peer group sets the standard for behavior, delinquency is often the result. A youth with a disability may be particularly vulnerable to peer-inspired delinquency because they may feel distanced from their peers, more so than others, because of their disability. The youth may be willing to engage in criminal activity on their quest for peer approval, especially when they do not have to answer to an authoritative figure. Lacking role models that exemplify proper social behavior, attitudes, and motives, along with possessing a strong internal desire for social acceptance within their peer group may lead youth to engage in criminal activity without fully understanding the consequences of their actions. Youth learn and yearn to impress their peers; not the traditional positive role models such as loving parents, teachers, and mentors. The model states that the fewer positive relations an individual has, the higher the likelihood that he, or she, will engage in criminal or negative activity¹.

The contributive factors determined in this report are derived from the for-mentioned model. They have been reduced to plain language terms for greater reader comprehension.

FAMILY

Family, defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as "*a social unit*", is perhaps the most important factor relevant to the behavior of a child or youth. Learning to respect authority begins within the family home. The head of household teaches the child how to treat authoritative figures by the way

¹ Youth Justice Feasibility Study, page 48

he or she allows the youth to treat them. Discipline and respect learned at home transcends into the way a youth behaves in public. Respect for the rules and laws of a household will correlate to respect for the laws and rules of society. Rebellion; however, may still occur and in some cases it can result in delinquency. A "perfect home" does not necessarily yield a law abiding youth, but having a strong family foundation is definitely a huge asset for adolescents. Unfortunately, a loving home does not exist for everyone. Ninety-five percent of YOD interviewed had reported living in a non-traditional residence (single parent families, foster homes, parents using/abusing substances, etc). Only twenty-five percent reported strong relations with at least one parent or step-parent, while a mere five percent reported strong relations with both parents.

Four sub-factors comprise the family factor; lack of parental guidance/support, negative influences within the home, disregard for behavioral consequences and the breakdown of the traditional family home. A greater understanding of the family factor is the intended result from the elaboration of the above sub-factors.

LACK OF PARENTAL GUIDANCE/SUPPORT: Parental involvement is a natural component of parenthood. Sometimes parents are forced to choose between being involved in their child's life or working long hours in order to support their family financially. In an attempt to generate sufficient income, parents sacrifice the amount of quality time they spend with their children. Lack of, or limited, finances are not the cause of all familial problems; nor are they necessarily the solution to a happy upbringing. Having a positive parental role model actively involved in a youth's life may be far more beneficial than a parent who only provides financial support.

Frustration with parenting can be the result of a youth's delinquency. Parents may not know how to deal with a delinquent child and they may also feel that the actions of the child were a result of their shortcomings as parents. Some parents neglect implementing social and disciplinary boundaries, not

because they are bad parents or do not care, but rather because of the frustration caused by their children ignoring the behavioral standards family and society have set in place.

As youth age and develop, many begin to distance themselves from their parents. At this stage of development parents can become less aware of the daily occurrences of their child's life. In extreme cases parents are often unaware that their children are engaging in criminal activity.

A parent, or parents, providing various levels of support, does not guarantee that a child will abstain from delinquent activity. Disciplinary actions that implement a respect for authority in the home, at school or in public, provide boundaries for youth that influence personal conduct and behavior. Parents must take the responsibility to inform their child of the consequences of poor behavior; both domestic and societal. Parents must also implement fair punishments at home.

Enforcing domestic discipline is not easy for all parents of YOD; however, this form of "tough parenting" can translate to socially appropriate and law abiding behavior by a child.

NEGATIVE INFLUENCES: The Social Process Model of adolescent deviance defines deviance as: "*deviating from the behavioral norm*".¹ The model assumes deviant behavior is learned by observation. The motives, attitudes and techniques that support deviance are developed by observing the behavior of the individuals within one's intimate relations. It is logical that a child will observe their parent or mentor as a model for behavior. The influence of family is sometimes obscured by the influence of less direct relations, (i.e. friends, peers, strangers, etc.). Negative influences in the home serve as a poor example for youth who are living in a very impressionable stage of their young lives. Lack of parental accountability can be as equally detrimental as a negative or inappropriate parental behavior.

Substance use and abuse was reported by thirty-five per cent of YOD interviewed. YOD reporting substance use, and or abuse, by a parental unit or mentor was also very common. As stated

¹ Social Process Model of Adolescent Deviance, p 47-48, Erickson, Crosnoe and Dornbusch 2000

above, youth learn deviant behavior from their relationships and therefore, if substance use or abuse exists at home it is likely that a youth observing this behavior will engage in similar activities.

Domestic violence is a harsh reality for many YOD. Exposure to domestic violence increases the child's risk of being involved in violent activity later in life¹. Observing one parent being abused by another can establish a tolerance for abuse in the home. As an adolescent enters adulthood and becomes involved in adult relations, [s]he may imitate the behavior that [s]he has witnessed at home. A youth that observes violence in the home is likely to engage in violent activity with their peers and against their loved ones². Sixty per cent of YOD interviewed for this project reported committing violent crimes, while fifty per cent reported some form of violence in their home.

DISREGARD FOR BEHAVIORAL CONSEQUENCES: An insightful link between the domestic relations of a youth and their involvement in criminal activity is offered in The Social Process Model. The model defines social bonds as the hooks that connect a person to social conventions and examines social bonds that are established during a person's life. The model states that individuals least likely to behave delinquently are the ones with the strongest social bonds and attachments³. When an awareness of behavioral consequences is implemented and initiated domestically, a youth realizes that negative actions have negative repercussions. They learn that bad behavior at home is punishable, as is public or societal disobedience. If a child is able to break rules at home without consequence they may not adhere to the rules of society because they have not learned that crime or misbehavior is accompanied by disciplinary actions and punishment.

The belief that deviant behavior will disappoint significant others or disrupt social relations, controls the impulse to break the rules⁴. If a youth has weak social bonds, they may not be as concerned

¹ Delinquent violent youth: Theory and interventions, Borduin & Schaffer 1998

² Peter Doucette, Youth Probation Officer

³ Youth Justice Feasibility Study, page 48

⁴ The Social Process Model of Adolescent Deviance, Erickson, Crosnoe and Dornbusch 2000

about disappointing anyone because there is no strong relation to disrupt. The inability of many YOD to form and maintain solid, healthy relationships is often the direct result of weak parental bonds.

BREAKDOWN OF THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY HOME: Ideally, all children would benefit from having a loving family; unfortunately our world is far from perfect, and sadly so are many of the family situations of YOD. Fifty per cent of YOD directly surveyed in this research reported witnessing violence in their home.

Single parent households, usually led by a mother, present several issues for YOD. Only one active parental relationship means one less authoritative figure in the household that can shape behavior and be observed as a model for social conduct. As stated earlier, the single parent may have to work more in order to finance the entire family by themselves. This sacrifice reduces the amount of time available that the parent can spend with their children. In a situation where a single parent owns the responsibility of what could be divided between two parental units, the parent is forced to decide between providing emotional support or financial resources for their family.

A stable upbringing is not experienced by many young offenders. A trend made evident in YOD research was that parents who had separated or divorced would alternate custody after the juvenile's behavior surpassed their individual level of tolerance. Foster care, at the request of parents or the state, is another scenario in which youth may express themselves through criminal conduct. Negative influences at home and a lack of guidance from family members, contributes to the population of youth in foster care. The responsibility of instilling behavioral consequences becomes the role of the foster parent.

ENVIRONMENT

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines environment as "1) *SURROUNDINGS*" or "2) *the whole complex of factors that influence the form and ability to survive of an organism or ecological community.*"¹

The surroundings in which YOD have been raised undoubtedly contributed to their conflict with the law². Ninety-five per cent of the interview subjects reported an untraditional family composition as their domestic environment.

Peer pressure and social class are the two components of environment that are examined in this section. Criminal conduct is believed to be relative to peer pressure/relations and social class. By examining these sub factors, it is the intent of this report to bring a greater understanding as to why YOD come into conflict with the law.

PEER PRESSURE: During adolescent development, the role of peers becomes more pronounced. As youth spend more time with peers, and less time with parents, a desire to impress a peer replaces the desire to impress a parent. If parental bonds are weak, or non-existent, the desire for approval from peers can be even more relevant and intense. A youth living with a disability may consider that being part of a group, whether the group is good or bad, is a social necessity. Behavior that gains attention or approval from the group may not be the typical form of conduct that the youth ordinarily displays. This is because of the separation YOD feel from peers. Because their disability categorizes the youth as "different", many are willing to break laws and rules to prove themselves as capable individuals and/or be accepted as part of a group.

The influence of negative or deviant peer groups can be detrimental to YOD. Unfortunately, once a youth comes into conflict with the law they belong to a group; the group of young offenders.

¹ The Merriam Webster Dictionary, pg 256

² Delinquent violent youth: Theory and intervention, Borduin & Schaffer 1998

Criminal activity may be more likely to impress and be accepted by delinquent peers. By interacting with these groups a youth increases the likelihood that they will continue to partake in criminal activity¹. The youth feels the pressure of wanting to impress others, and can overcompensate the inadequacy they feel by using delinquent behavior to overshadow their disability.

SOCIAL CLASS: Living within a lower socio-economic class does not absolutely dictate that a youth will behave delinquently or become in conflict with the law. However, coupled with intersecting factors; such as, poverty, disability, addiction, etc., a youth's social situation can be a precursor of criminal behavior.

Communities that are dominated by poverty are often havens for criminal activity². Theft is used as a means for obtaining food, drugs and money. Drugs are common in these communities and drug use is an acceptable form behavior. Behavioral standards are not consistent with those in communities of higher economic standard. Drugs distort the minds of the people that use them while some youth, especially susceptible to this distortion, learn to steal in order to gain necessities. Eventually they are caught and prosecuted.

Treatments that are not covered under the public health sector, as beneficial as they may be, may not be affordable for the families of the YOD who dearly need them. Choosing between basic necessities or resources that help YOD should not be a circumstance faced by families in Nova Scotia.

DISABILITY

The World Health Organization defines disability as: "*the interaction between features of a person's body and the features of the society in which the individual lives.*"³

It is undeniable that having a disability can be a contributor to juvenile delinquency. Young offenders with disabilities may not process situations and events the same as that individuals without

¹ Delinquent violent youth: Theory and intervention, Borduin & Schaffer 1998

² Delinquent violent youth: Theory and intervention, Borduin & Schaffer 1998

³ <http://www.who.int/en/>

disabilities. Cognitive impairments can affect an individual's reasoning and comprehension. These types of disabilities, as well as weak social bonds, may account for why YOD do not comprehend the consequences of their behavior.

Addiction, a disability reported by thirty five percent of the interview sample, can negatively impact a youth's behavior. Drug use may allow the youth to relate to their peers directly; however, it impairs cognitive function and can cause mood problems and agitation when removed from one's lifestyle. The influence of alcohol was not only evident in their lives, but YOD often admitted to being under the influence while committing crimes.

Living and coping with a disability requires resources from the individual, family and various levels of government. Families with limited, or little monetary resources, may not be able to afford quality resources for their children.

RURAL COMMUNITIES

Geographic location is linked to the disability factor. Rural areas are often a significant distance from the urban centers which primarily have the premium disability services. Small rural populations correspond to a smaller tax base and less money is available regionally for services.

Disabilities, some which may cause impaired judgment, are left un-treated, or sometimes just as detrimental, under-treated. The YOD continue to engage in criminal activity as their disability, left untreated, and accompanying impaired judgment continue to affect their social conduct.

The sub-factors that compose the rural community factor are: 1) Access to Services and 2) Boredom.

ACCESS TO SERVICES: Independent transportation is often required to get to an urban center from a rural area. Many of the available services are not easily accessed by YOD living in rural areas. Parents who have limited time and resources to spend with their child at home are not likely to be able to

commit time and finances for traveling to obtain services. These services include: mental health, addiction, youth, rehabilitative and correctional services. All of these services are vital components of treatment for different forms of disability and societal reintegration.

Court ordered assessments occur infrequently outside of urban areas. Fewer residents in a community can translate to fewer professionals to treat clients and make such assessments. Addiction and mental health services are incredibly overwhelmed; therefore, even when the services are available, there are long wait times to obtain proper medical treatment.

BOREDOM: YOD from this research sample often cited boredom as a reason for their negative behavior. Limited recreational services, within rural areas, consequently resulted in YOD finding alternative means of entertainment. These alternate means often lead to a youth engaging in criminal activity. Youth oriented programs, at accessible locations, were recommended by the interviewed YOD; some of whom cited that these programs could lead to a reduced inclination to commit crimes.

Experts included in the YOD research were not unanimous in the belief that boredom is a factor of juvenile delinquency; however youth may lack the internal controls to distinguish right from wrong. Therefore they may self identify boredom as a legitimate factor. Something that a mature outsider may consider to be faulty justification for delinquency may be entirely legitimate from the perspective of a YOD.

EDUCATION

Education is defined as: *"the action or process of educating or being educated"*¹

Education may be both a predictive and contributive factor. The majority of YOD from the sample were in a grade that was inappropriate to their age. None of the youth that were of an age appropriate for high school graduation had actually graduated.

¹ The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, pg 245

If an appreciation for education and authority does not exist, school may not be attractive to youth. Time away from the classroom gives the youth less time in structured activities and more free time. This scenario creates a higher level of boredom that may result in the youth being delinquent.

Whether education is a correlative or causative factor is not determinable from this YOD research. It is, however, an important component when determining how a youth will behave in public and respect authority. The standards of behavior and respect that are instilled in a child in educational environments transcend to the behavior that they will exhibit in public situations.¹

¹ Perspectives on Youth Crime, pg 44-47

Identifying Barriers Encountered By Young Offenders with Disabilities

A Barrier is: *"something that separates, demarcates, or serves as a barricade."*¹

Disability, and the coping mechanisms applied by youth sometimes result in negative/criminal behavior. With criminal behavior and convictions come the stereotypes that are associated with the criminal population. Negative behavior gains peer-approval from these peer groups. The YOD, who may have witnessed stigma from their disability, now face the stigma associated with criminal offenders and criminality. When criminals become the peer group that a YOD desires to belong to and impress, their offences, in scale, can increase exponentially. The disobedient actions that impressed their youthful peers may not be enough to impress veteran criminals. The crimes committed by YOD, after their incarceration, are likely to be of a more serious nature and have more serious consequences.

The barriers identified in this report are not necessarily unique to YOD; however, YOD may encounter them more regularly than a youth or offender that does not have to cope with a disability. Every person faces barriers throughout their life; it is how one confronts and surmounts barriers that will dictate the type of person they will become and the type of life that they will live.

The barriers introduced and examined in this report are: stigma, criminal records, lack of mentorship, lack of treatment, lack of familial/community support, negative peer groups, and education. They are encountered by all types of people, especially youth, and even more often by YOD.

¹ The Merriam Webster Dictionary, pg 75

Elaboration of Barriers

STIGMA- Youth encounter stigma in many of the societal institutions of which they belong to and are associated with. Young offenders with disabilities face the stigma associated with being different from their peers because of their disability. During one's adolescence, peer acceptance is very important. Having a disability can distance one from their peers; the desire to be the same as everyone else is unrealistic because YOD are simply not the same as their peers. They are no better, no worse, only different than the majority of their peers. The desire to be accepted may result in behavior that gets attention from their peers, and potentially from authority. The YOD commits the crime, faces the punishment, and encounters the stigma that is not only relative to their disability, but also relative to their criminal behavior. It appears that some youth prefer to be identified as a capable criminal, as opposed to being identified as someone with a disability.

CRIMINAL RECORD- Having a criminal record directly affects an individual's life. It can affect everything from traveling out of country, to the severity of punishments for offences committed while already having a record. A criminal record is also a barrier YOD encounter when trying to find employment. Some employers require a background check that displays any existing criminal records. In rural communities, the geographic focus of this report, a criminal record can be a significant barrier because community members are often aware of who, in their community, breaks the law and who has a criminal record. Employers may be hesitant to hire someone that they, and the majority of their community, associate with criminal history and behavior.

LACK OF MENTORSHIP- A mentor is defined as "*a trusted counselor or guide*"¹. Often times the most influential mentor in someone's life is a parent. Considering that ninety-five percent of the YOD interviewed for this report came from non-traditional households and that only five per-cent reported

¹ The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, p 461

strong relations with both parents, the absence of mentors within the families of YOD is notable.

Mentors and positive role models outside of the family may not be as available to youth living in rural communities, as limited youth services limit the number of potential mentors in the community.

LACK OF TREATMENT- The major components of healthy management of a disability are self identification, understanding and embracement, as well as optimization of available resources. By embracing a disability, a youth or individual is aware of the available treatments and accepts the reality that treatment can help them. Rural communities often lack the social services that YOD need in order to perform at the best of their abilities and avoid situations that lead to unlawful activities. If youth cannot acknowledge, accept and own their disability, it is unlikely that they will understand the importance of suggested treatments. Lack of available treatment and under utilized services in rural communities contributes to YOD behaving delinquently.

LACK OF FAMILIAL/COMMUNITY SUPPORT- Positive support at school and from family and community is crucial for youth to become contributing members of society. Much of our behavior is learned from observation. If youth live in a supportive environment it is likely that they will be supportive members of a community. Support from parental units is paramount in adolescent development¹. As made evident through the YOD research, young offenders often do not receive proper guidance or treatment from their parents.

NEGATIVE PEER GROUPS- The attempts by a YOD to impress their peers can often result in criminal activity and prosecution. When peer groups are proponents of delinquency, the YOD engages in negative behavior in order to gain acceptance. The justice and judiciary systems prosecute according to the youth's actions, not their motivations. An individual is responsible for his own actions; the group is not. After a YOD has been incarcerated, the progress that they have made while detained may be reversed or negated when the youth re-acquaints themselves with the negative peer group they tried to

¹ Delinquent violent youth: Theory and intervention, Borduin & Schaffer 1998

impress with criminal behavior. Also, members of the penal population form a new peer group that is accepting of criminal behavior. The criminal record of a youth acts as an attribute within this community.

EDUCATION- reachAbility's YOD research identified that none of the YOD subjects had education levels appropriate to their age. This is not believed to be coincidental. The legal processes accompanying delinquency divert attention from school. Instead of learning in the classroom the youth learn elsewhere; within peer groups, on streets, or other unsupervised environments. Disabilities may deter some youth from participating in group activities; certain activities their disability. Education provides employment opportunities that may not be available without it.

Recommendations That Address the Barriers Faced by YOD

The barriers that are faced by the YOD of today are different than the barriers faced in the past, and are not necessarily the barriers that will be encountered by YOD in the future. Society has the ability to dictate the barriers that YOD face and the severity that these barriers affect people. The recommendations are specific to the barriers faced by YOD. The intention of this section of the YOD research project is to eliminate the barriers, or make them less overwhelming for YOD.

Each barrier identified by YOD, and throughout academic research, will be accompanied by plausible recommendations and solutions that suit each barrier.

STIGMA:

- Mandatory disability awareness training (DAT) within school systems and for individuals who encounter YOD regularly; such as peers, employers, legal professionals, teachers, etc.
- An increase in government sponsored work experience programs that allow youth to gain skills and experience for future employment, without directly encountering the stigmas of society.
- Self confidence workshops that encourage YOD to embrace who they are and their disability.

CRIMINAL RECORD:

- Awareness seminars that inform YOD on how and when to disclose their disability and criminal record to a potential employer.
- Education in elementary school systems that undeniably illustrates the negative consequences that a criminal record can have on an individual's life.

LACK OF MENTORSHIP:

- Effective mentorship programs created by relevant stakeholders with the purpose of giving youth a positive mentor outside of the home.
- Student and parent activity programs at schools that encourage parents to spend time with their child and be positive mentors.
- Guest speakers in school and penal systems that were once YOD and are now contributing members of society.
- Drop in centers or after school programs that provide resources on coping with a disability and obtaining employment, as well as offering directional advice from mentors.
- Optimization of existing mentors (more involvement by guidance counselors and extra curricular coordinators at junior and senior high levels)

LACK OF TREATMENT/RESOURCES:

- Reduce wait times for initial assessments by increasing the amount of specialists in region by increasing funding for community services.
- Offer more incentives to provincial residents who choose to work in Nova Scotia upon completion of their post-secondary education as this could increase the number of available clinicians and service providers.
- Bring the services to the residents of rural areas either within the school system or other community institutions.
- Full financing for treatments that help YOD manage their behavior and health.
- Scheduled, mandatory treatment programs structured and designed to support youth immediately after leaving custody.

LACK OF FAMILIAL/COMMUNITY SUPPORT:

- Educational programs and parent support groups should exist in all communities and be made available at all schools; schools are often the primary community institution in a rural area.
- Implement a 'bring a mentor to school' program in which a youth brings a parent or someone they admire to their school.
- Educational programs should be provided for community groups and employers to encourage communities to support YOD.

NEGATIVE PEER GROUPS:

- Transition programs for YOD, once they leave custody, focusing on re-integrating YOD into society.
- Mentorship programs that ensure/monitor that a YOD is not re-offending.
- Legislation that (for extreme cases) prohibits young offenders from having any contact with peers who have a criminal record.

EDUCATION:

- GED programs designed specifically for YOD.
- Disability-oriented educational programs that teach trades or other employment skills in an understanding environment.
- Make school curriculum more interactive and incorporating various learning styles so that youth maintain attention and interest.
- Physical activity programs that incorporate learning with the competitive nature of sport.

CONCLUSION

The link between disability and juvenile delinquency has been clarified by giving a greater understanding as to what factors contribute to criminal behavior by youth within this "Young Offenders with Disabilities" research project. After YOD come in conflict with the law their specific disability is less of a barrier than the stigma faced by persons with disabilities and with criminal records. A criminal record, which may be the result of actions that a youth has partaken in as a coping mechanism for their disability, stays with a youth indefinitely. Criminal history of residents is often common knowledge for the members of rural communities. This makes finding employment in their community very difficult for YOD.

Negative domestic influences, as well as, negative peer groups are perhaps the most detrimental components in the lives of YOD. When a youth is surrounded by peers and relations that exhibit negative influences and behaviors, they are very likely to act in a negative manor¹.

Stereotypes and stigmas towards others are developed at an early age and; therefore, disability awareness should be initiated at the earliest age possible. We, as a society, can shape the ideologies of our youth so that they are both more aware and more accepting of disabilities.

The generations of the future need not encounter the same barriers as the generations who have come before them. To achieve this future, society must first recognize the barriers faced by YOD and then own, accept, embrace, and finally, act upon them. The conclusions and recommendations made in this report are by no means absolute, and the statistics only represent the conducted sample. reachAbility is committed to continuing this research and further elaborating upon the conclusions presented in this project.

¹ Delinquent violent youth: Theory and interventions, Borduin & Schaffer 1998

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